



PSIWORLD 2014

Elements of experiential psychotherapy in the development of the social and emotional skills of the hearing impaired students

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Abstract

This psychological research proposes the design and implementation of a program to educate the emotional intelligence based on the techniques of the experiential psychotherapy tailored to the hearing-impaired student's psychological profile and to identify the effects of the development of this type of intelligence on the personality by using Nonverbal Personality Questionnaire (NPQ). Experimental data processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, show that our program has a strong effect on the hearing impaired students' interpersonal domain of emotional intelligence and also increases their adaptability to the social environment and encourages them to try new life experiences.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific Committee of PSIWORLD 2014.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, experiential psychotherapy, hearing impaired children, group therapy, Nonverbal Personality Questionnaire

1. Introduction

Hearing impaired children, due to the delay of the verbal language acquisition, experience difficulties in the development of their social skills. Therefore, they need group therapy to learn to recognize and understand their emotions and to listen to other people and understand their emotions and feelings. The main factors of group therapy (interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, group therapist, selection of participants) and group development stages (orientation, conflict and collaboration stages) are described exhaustively by Yalom and Leszcz (Yalom & Leszcz, 2013).

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Experiential group psychotherapy through its techniques (psychological group games, drawing, collage, movement therapy, drama therapy, therapeutic metaphor, creating essays, stories and poems by group drawings) converges to the children becoming aware of their feelings (Popa, 2011). Gestalt is a German that can be translated by „print’, „shape”, „pattern” or „configuration” (Dave, 2013). Gestalt-creative therapy techniques „teach kids to experience here and now personal problems reaching the restructuring insights (Anghel, 2003). By applying the gestalt therapy techniques, the children can be guided to reconcile the opposing parts of their personality (Mitrofan, Vladislav, & Badea, How Could We Unlock and Reharmonize the Course With Obstacles Of The Human Development, Chapter I, What is the Child Psychotherapy, 2003). The experiential group of personal development meets the child’s needs of communication with other children. Participation in this type of group allows the children to discover themselves in relation to the others. In the experiential group the children adopt new attitudes and behaviors without fear of risk (Anghel, 2003).

2. The experimental design

2.1. Purpose of Study

This psycho-pedagogical research proposes the design and implementation of a program to educate the emotional intelligence based on the techniques of the experiential psychotherapy tailored to the hearing impaired student’s psychological profile and to identify the effects of the development of this type of intelligence on the personality and on the intrapersonal and interpersonal effectiveness by using Nonverbal Personality Questionnaire (Iliescu, Minulescu, & Nedelcea, 2006).

2.2. Research objectives

O1: Psycho-diagnostic investigation of each student’s structure of personality involved in the research using Nonverbal Personality Questionnaire (NPQ).

O2: Design and application of a program to educate the emotional intelligence based on the techniques of experiential psychotherapy tailored to the hearing impaired student’s psychological profile.

O3: The identification of the effects of our program: on the subjects’ intrapersonal domain of emotional intelligence (the awareness and expression of their emotions, their assertiveness, independence and achievement); on the subjects’ interpersonal domain of the emotional intelligence (their empathic capacities, social responsibility); on their adaptability (their flexibility, problem solving ability); on their openness to experience.

2.3. Research Hypotheses

The assumptions on which we have built our research design were:

H1: It is assumed that the consistent implementation of a program to educate the emotional intelligence has a direct impact on the hearing impaired student’s intrapersonal domain of emotional intelligence (greater assertiveness, more independence and a higher need of achievement). Better scores are expected on the next scales of NPQ: Dominance, Autonomy, Achievement, Endurance, Social Recognition, Neuroticism and Conscientiousness.

H2: It is assumed that the consistent implementation of our program has a direct impact on the students’ interpersonal domain of emotional intelligence (optimization of their interpersonal relationships, increased social responsibility and higher empathy). Better scores are expected on the next scales of NPQ: Affiliation, Nurturance, Achievement, Order, Endurance, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness and Extraversion.

H3: It is assumed that the consistent implementation of our program has a direct impact on students’ adaptability (increased flexibility, optimization of their problem solving skills). Better scores are expected on the next scales of NPQ: Affiliation, Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, Order and Endurance. Better scores are expected on Impulsivity and Neuroticism scales of NPQ.

H4: It is assumed that the consistent implementation of our program affects directly the students’ openness to new life experiences (they will be more curious, sensitive, creative, flexible and independent). Better scores are expected on the next scales of NPQ: Thrill-Seeking, Sentience, Understanding and Openness.

2.4. *Establishing of the Research Variables*

The independent variable in our experiment is the set of techniques used to develop the hearing impaired students' socio-emotional abilities in the secondary schools. The dependent variables are the subjects' personality traits associated to the scales of the Nonverbal Personality Questionnaire (NPQ) used to validate our research.

2.5. *The Sample of Subjects*

We involved 10 subjects in our research, aged between 14 and 16. The selection of students to participate in our educational program was based on their motivation. The sample is representative and does not differ in terms of the essential characteristics of the population from which it was selected. All the students are hearing impaired.

2.6. *Research Methods*

In this research we have used the following methods and techniques: pedagogical observation, techniques of the experiential expressive and gestalt-creative psychotherapy (psychological group games, group drawings, collage, movement therapy, drama therapy, therapeutic metaphor and creating stories and poems by group drawings). A child's drawing has a great symbolic value. It is sometimes the only way for the children to express their feelings that they can't verbalize because of their reduced vocabulary or their guilt, shame or fear feelings (Mitrofan, We Play Learning, We Learn Playing, 2005). Drawing is a means of communication preferred by hearing-impaired children. The drawings of deaf children contain much more details based on what they perceived (Wallon, Cambier, & Engelhart, 2008). Decoding the signs and symbols used in the hearing-impaired children allows us to understand their emotional life. Like drawing, a collage is a way for hearing impaired children to express their emotional experience and highlight how they relate to people around them. The therapeutic functions of the metaphor (mediation function, regressive function, mirror function, model function and signification function) are described in details by Dafinoiu in his book "Elements of integrative psychotherapy" (Dafinoiu, 2000). The drama therapy "helps the children to express, understand and work on their conflicts, to produce the insight and the change" (Mitrofan, Vladislav, & Badea, How Could We Unlock and Reharmonize the Course With Obstacles Of The Human Development, Chapter I, What is the Child Psychotherapy, 2003).

2.7. *Assessment Tools Research*

In our research, we used, as a primary tool for the assessing of the students' personality Nonverbal Personality Questionnaire (NPQ)

2.8. *The statistical interpretation of experimental data*

In order to establish the effectiveness of our program, experimental data were processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. In our research we have made the following two assumptions:

- the null hypothesis: the differences between before and after test scores are due to the chance
- the alternative hypothesis: there is a significant statistically difference between before and after test scores as a result of the program to educate the emotional intelligence applied to the subjects included in the experimental sample.

To test the two statistical hypotheses we have applied Paired-Samples T-Test, if the distribution of scores did not differ significantly from a normal statistical distribution and non-parametric Wilcoxon test, if the distribution of scores differed significantly from a normal statistical distribution.

In both tests, the null hypothesis is rejected for a significance threshold whose value is less than 0, 05 ($p \leq 0, 05$) for a confidence level of 95%.

The check of the normality of data distribution was based on the Kolmogorov - Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests. According to these tests, the value of the variable did not differ significantly from a normal distribution if the result

is not statistically significant in these tests, that is if the significance threshold is greater than or equal to 0,05 ($p \geq 0,05$) for a confidence level of 95%.

For the interpretation of the effect size of the program to educate the emotional intelligence we have used the reference values established by Cohen (1988) for d and r indicators mentioned by Labăr: the effect is very powerful if $d = 0.8$ and $r = 0.5$, medium if $d = 0.5$ and $r = 0.3$ and weak if $d = 0.2$ and $r = 0.1$ (Labăr, 2008).

Table 1 presents the values of statistical significance threshold, p , and d and r statistical indicators.

Table 1. The values of statistical significance threshold, p , d and r statistical indicators

Scale	Kolmogorov-Smirnova		Shapiro-Wilk		Paired-Samples T Test		Wilcoxon Test	
	Before	After	Before	After				
	p	p	p	p	p	d	p	r
Achievement	0,09	0,20	0,04	0,37			0,01	0,84
Affiliation	0,20	0,20	0,40	0,61	0,01	1,01		
Aggression	0,02	0,01	0,04	0,00			0,01	0,89
Autonomy	0,02	0,20	0,00	0,66			0,40	0,26
Dominance	0,20	0,20	0,04	0,66			0,07	0,57
Endurance	0,16	0,20	0,06	0,30	0,05	0,76		
Exhibition	0,20	0,20	0,27	0,69	0,45	0,26		
Thrill-Seeking	0,20	0,07	0,92	0,33	0,02	0,92		
Impulsivity	0,20	0,20	0,12	0,13	0,62	0,17		
Nurturance	0,20	0,20	0,48	0,65	0,00	1,59		
Order	0,20	0,20	0,88	0,65	0,03	0,83		
Play	0,20	0,12	0,18	0,36	0,61	0,29		
Sentience	0,20	0,20	0,88	0,16	0,02	0,94		
Social Recognition	0,17	0,11	0,30	0,09	0,00	1,61		
Succorance	0,20	0,20	0,33	0,78	0,73	0,12		
Understanding	0,20	0,20	0,96	0,27	0,44	0,27		
Extraversion	0,20	0,20	0,14	0,73	0,08	0,67		
Agreeableness	0,20	0,20	0,75	0,88	0,23	0,43		
Conscientiousness	0,05	0,20	0,13	0,97	0,00	1,47		
Neuroticism	0,06	0,19	0,21	0,76	0,01	1,01		
Openness	0,20	0,19	1,00	0,13	0,01	1,06		

2.9. Validation of Research Hypothesis based on statistical processing of data

The analysis of statistical data shows that our program increases the subjects' desire to self-betterment as it has been demonstrated by its strong effect on the scales Achievement, Social recognition and Conscientiousness. Dominance and independence were not significantly altered, demonstrating that the applied program had no influence on their assertiveness and independence. Therefore the research hypothesis H1, related to our program has a direct impact on the subjects' intrapersonal field of emotional intelligence, was fully confirmed.

The program has a strong impact on the students' interpersonal domain as it has been demonstrated by its strong effect on the scales Affiliation and Nurturance. It has a strong impact on the improvement of the social responsibility to the subjects as it has been demonstrated by its strong effect on the scales Conscientiousness, Achievement, Affiliation, Nurturance and Order and on their empathic capacities as it has been demonstrated by its strong effect on the scale Nurturance. Therefore, the research hypothesis H2, related to our program has a direct impact on the subjects' interpersonal field of emotional intelligence, was fully confirmed.

Our program has a strong impact on the subjects' flexibility as it has been demonstrated by its strong effect on: Openness to Experience, Affiliation and Extraversion. It has a strong impact on the subjects' problem solving ability as it has been demonstrated by its strong effect on: Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience. Therefore, the research hypothesis H3, related to our program has a direct impact on the subjects' adaptability, was fully confirmed.

Our program has a strong impact on Openness to Experience, Sentience and Thrill-Seeking. Therefore, the research hypotheses H4, related to our program has a direct impact on the students' openness to experience, was fully confirmed.

3. Conclusions

The application of NPQ, whose items consist of illustrations, whose meaning is easily understood by hearing impaired people, allowed us an objective assessment of their personality structure and the key components of the emotional intelligence in terms of Bar-On. Low scores obtained by all subjects involved in the research on deviance scale show that they have understood the significance of nonverbal items in the questionnaire because their responses were not random.

Experimental results show that a consistent implementation of a program to educate the emotional intelligence based on techniques of experiential psychotherapy determine the change of the personality traits and hence some of the components of the emotional intelligence to the hearing impaired students.

The research results represent a strong argument for the use of the assessment tools such as NPQ and other projective psychological tests to know better the hearing-impaired students' personality structure who learn in the Romanian schools nowadays. They could contribute to the restructuring of the curriculum in agreement with their abilities, their real needs, ideals and aspirations. They also stimulate the Special Education Teachers to use intervention strategies based on experiential psychotherapy techniques, during the recovery and compensation activities to form their emotional competencies.

There are also limits in our research. The subjects learn in the same class and they know each other and the social desirability phenomenon could not be controlled; subjects may provide social desirable responses to NPQ.

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